

Where to Draw the Line? Longinus, Goulu, and Balzac's Lettres.

This article is interested in some of the key staging posts in the vicious debates surrounding the publication of Guez de Balzac's collected volumes of letters in the 1620s. I will be making two main claims. First, that the place of Longinus in these debates, already acknowledged as important, needs to be rethought with particular reference to a text that has been consistently overlooked: Goulu's *Lettres de Phyllarque à Ariste* (1627).¹ Second, that Goulu's use of epideictic or demonstrative rhetoric – the rhetoric of praise and blame (in this case, blame) – is much more interesting than has previously been recognised. His text is, admittedly, a lengthy, repetitive, vitriolic and *ad hominem* attack upon Balzac and his supporters. But it also suggests compelling points about its own method and process, which is to say the process of dispraise.² Goulu's censorious curriculum highlights and affirms the interconnectedness between demonstrative rhetoric and the process of demonstration. In blaming Balzac's qualities, he aims to demonstrate them vividly for the reader, co-opting Longinus as he does so.

This use of Longinus is interesting, because Longinus also participates in the ekphrastic tradition: an author's words can be declared so effective, so sublime, that 'you seem to see what you describe and bring it vividly before the eyes of your audience'.³ This ekphrasis or *demonstratio* is the subject of a number of rhetorical handbooks that date as early as the first century AD with Theon in Greek and Quintilian in Latin. They utilise a key idea that goes back to the hellenistic period, spanning rhetoric and poetics: the notion of *enargeia*, or the ability to make conjure something in writing or speech to the extent that it seems truly to be before us.⁴ By looking at Goulu, we can deepen our sense both

¹ Goulu, *Lettres de Phyllarque à Ariste. Où il est traité de la vraye & de la bonne Eloquence, contre la fausse & la mauvaise du Sieur de Balzac. Première partie.* Paris, Nicolas Buon, 1627. *Deuxième partie.* Paris, Nicolas Buon, 1628. References in this article will be to these two editions.

² 'Epideictic is the rhetoric of praise and blame, but we hear very little about the blaming side of it.' David Colclough, 'Verse Libels and the Epideictic Tradition in Early Stuart England', *Huntingdon Library Quarterly*, vol. 69, 2006, pp. 15-30 (18). Colclough examines the sources for the theory and practice of praise and blame that were available to students in sixteenth- and seventeenth-century England, providing a useful emphasis on techniques of blame.

³ Longinus, *On the Sublime*, W.H. Fyfe tr., D. Russell rev., Cambridge, MA, 1995, 15.1.

⁴ *Demonstratio*, as 'showing' or 'pointing out,' is one of the Latin tradition's translations of *ekphrasis* or *enargeia*: 'It is ocular demonstration when an event is so described in words that the business seems to be enacted and the subject to pass vividly before our eyes.' *Ad herennium*, Harry Caplan tr., Cambridge MA, 1989, IV, iv, 68. Quintilian also uses the notion of *phantasia* to insist that through ekphrasis the orator can have 'the greatest power in the expression of emotions'. Quintilian, *Institutio oratoria*, Donald A. Russell ed. and tr., Cambridge MA, 2000, 6.2.29. Longinus says of *phantasia* that, 'It may be said generally to introduce a great deal of excitement and emotion into one's speeches, but when combined with factual arguments it not only convinces the audience, it positively masters them.' *On the Sublime*, as in n. 3, 15.9. See in particular Simon Goldhill, 'What is Ekphrasis For?', *Classical Philology*, 2007, pp. 1-19 (3): this volume is a special issue on ekphrasis. See also Caroline van Eck, *Rhetoric and the Visual Arts*, Cambridge, 2007, on the persuasive power of the visual.

of the importance of the Longinian sublime in 1620s France and of the way the quarrel surrounding Balzac's letters engages with theories of ekphrasis, connecting these to cross-disciplinary prescriptions about decorum and verisimilitude.

Guez de Balzac (1594-1654) retired at 30 from courtly service to his country estate in the south-west of France, where he gathered together and published collections of the letters he had written while establishing his court career.⁵ He employs a style described by Marc Fumaroli as an 'ironic urbanity': a highly self-aware use of the tropes that dominated courtly language.⁶ Convinced that France was the modern heir to Rome, he writes in imitation of Cicero's *Epistolae*, with Lipsius as a more immediate reference point, looking to transpose the elegant hyperbole of Ciceronian oratory into an improved modern French.⁷ With their eloquent descriptions of worldly pleasures, his letters easily lend themselves to charges of *libertinage*.⁸

The backlash begins immediately, with a Gallican suspicion, particularly within the De Thou and Dupuy circles, of Balzac's proud assertions of newness and hyperbolic turns of phrase, which are connected to a burgeoning 'Italianism' and ultramontane influence. Frère André de Saint-Denis's *Conformité de l'éloquence de Monsieur de Balzac avec celle des plus grands personnages du temps passé et du présent* contributed to the polemic, circulating in pamphlet form from 1625 and accusing Balzac of plagiarism or 'larcin' – although, as Mathilde Bombart notes, the problem with this 'larcin' is not that Balzac claims to be original when he is not, but rather that he sets himself up as 'modern' when he should not.⁹ The ongoing quarrel, by now giving rise to significant public interest, prompted François Ogier's *Apologie pour Monsieur Balzac*, which printed the *Conformité*, the better to engage with it and deny its charges.¹⁰ The

⁵ Jean-Louis Guez de Balzac, *Lettres du sieur de Balzac*, Paris, Toussaint Du Bray, 1624; *Les Premières Lettres de Guez de Balzac* (1618-1627), H. Bibas and K.T. Butler, eds., Paris, 1933-1934, 2 vol.

⁶ 'Il osait recourir, en les colorant d'ironique urbanité, à des figures d'hyperbole qui reflétaient la civilité complimenteuse de règle à la Cour.' M. Fumaroli, *L'Âge de l'éloquence*, (Geneva, 2002), p. 544.

⁷ Justus Lipsius (1547-1606) brought out three collections or *Centuriae* (each containing 100 epistles) in his lifetime, the first appearing in Leiden in 1586. He prepared another *Centuria* for posthumous publication by his executor, who then also added a fifth volume.

⁸ 'Il est vrai qu'il y a si longtemps que je fais du mal, que je n'ai plus de mémoire de mon innocence [...].' *Les Premières Lettres*, as in n.5, letter IX, p. 34.

⁹ 'La mise en évidence du pillage auquel se serait livré Balzac ne se fait pas au nom d'une exigence d'originalité, mais constitue une réaction à sa posture de "moderne" et à son succès.' Mathilde Bombart, *La Querelle des Lettres de Guez de Balzac. Ecriture, polémique et critique dans la France du premier XVII^e siècle*, Paris, 2007, p. 238. See Bombart for a detailed discussion of more than thirty books, pamphlets and collections that make up the quarrel; see also Marc Fumaroli, as in n. 6, Christian Jouhaud, *Les Pouvoirs de la littérature. Histoire d'un paradoxe*, Paris, 2000, pp. 27-95, Eric Méchoulan, *Le livre avalé: de la littérature entre mémoire et culture*, Montreal, 2004, pp. 107-145, and Zobeidah Youssef, *Polémique et littérature chez Guez de Balzac*, Paris 1972.

¹⁰ Ogier, *Apologie pour Monsieur de Balzac*, Paris, Claude Morlot, 1627, reproduced with an introduction by Jean Jehasse, Saint-Etienne, 1977. Tallemant des Réaux suggests that Balzac wrote the *Apologie* himself: 'Ogier le predicateur, son amy, entreprit de faire son Apologie. Il y en avoit desjà cinq ou six feuilles d'imprimées; Gomberville m'a dit qu'il les avoit, quand Balzac, arrivant icy, ne trouva point cela à sa fantaisie: il refit tout le discours, et ne se servit que de la

Apologie of April 1627, combined with the publication in June that year of Balzac's *Œuvres* (a revised version of his *Premières Lettres* of 1624), then provoked a response from Jean Goulu, a member of the order of the Feuillants, whose work we shall now go on to analyse in detail.¹¹ His *Lettres de Phyllarque à Ariste* were published for the first time in October 1627, with a 'seconde partie' added in 1628; both parts were so successful that they were reissued later in 1628, and then in a combined volume in 1630.¹²

Longinus plays an important part in the quarrel surrounding Balzac's letters. Critics have long noted that his *On the Sublime* is a reference point for Balzac and, conversely, that Balzac plays a key role in the history of ideas about the sublime in France.¹³ Longinus's emphasis on the 'power' of the speaker – 'a well-timed flash of sublimity shatters everything like a bolt of lightning and reveals the full power of the speaker at a single stroke' (*On the Sublime*, 1.4) – also finds its way into the quarrel about his letters.¹⁴ Ogier's *Apologie* sets Balzac's forceful prose against that of his contemporaries, who bring to mind the 'fous' criticised by 'le sophiste Longin'.¹⁵ The paraphrase is clear:

Car les choses extraordinaires exprimees en termes magnifiques ne persuadent pas seulement mais estonnent les escoutants, & le souverain Orateur ne meine pas seulement son auditeur où bon lui semble, mais aussi le ravit et le transporte hors de soy-mesme. (pp. 73-4)

Ogier brings Longinus's sublime to mind with his emphasis on a paradoxical kind of excellence, exceeding conventional theory:

L'excellence du parfait Orateur n'est pas dans la mediocrité. Il doit aller jusques a l'excez, puis que sa fin est de faire les choses petites, grandes, & les grandes, petites. Il faut qu'il sorte quelquefois des chemins, pour

matiere. Cela n'avoit garde de ne pas réussir, car Ogier est fort capable de choisir bien ses materiaux, et Balzac de faire fort bien le discours; aussy est-ce une des plus belles pieces que nous ayons.' Gédéon Tallemant des Réaux, *Historiettes*, A. Adam, ed., Paris, 1961, vol. II, p. 44.

¹¹ The Feuillants was a reformed branch of the Cistercians, and one of the most distinguished congregations of Paris at the time, dedicated to austere contemplation through prayer, study and manual labour. On the royal favour enjoyed by the order, see Elisabeth Stopp, Jean Goulu and his "Life" of François de Sales', *The Modern Language Review*, vol. 62, 1967, pp. 226-237 (230-1).

¹² For the best account of Goulu's bibliography, see Mathilde Bombart, 'Entre littérature et religion. Les pratiques d'auteur de Jean Goulu', *Revue de synthèse*, vol. 126, 2007, pp. 123-40.

¹³ 'Guez de Balzac est incontestablement l'un des jalons essentiels de l'histoire du sublime au XVII^e siècle en France.' Emmanuel Bury, *Le Classicisme. L'Avènement du modèle littéraire français, 1660-1680*, Paris, 1993, p. 34, cited in Sophie Hache, *La Langue du ciel: Le sublime en France au XVII^e siècle*, Paris, Champion, 2000, p. 25.

¹⁴ As in n. 1.

¹⁵ 'Tant en leur prose qu'en leurs vers on ne remarque que de fausses subtilitez, des sotises estudiees, & des raisons contraires aux bonnes. Toutefois ils meritent quelque excuse, puis qu'en cela ils ont imité les anciens, & que devant eux il y a des fous de la mesme espece, tels que Gorgias le Leontin, Callisthenes, Clitarchus, Amphicrates, Hegesias, & autres, dont nous n'avons pas les livres, & ne connoissons les defaux que par le rapport que le Sophiste Longin en a fait.' Ogier, *Apologie pour Monsieur de Balzac*, as in n. 10, pp. 74-5.

prendre les routes, Qu'on le perde de veuë, pourveu qu'il ne s'égare pas,
Qu'il marche sur les précipices, sans pour cela se precipiter.¹⁶

Compare *On the Sublime* 33:

Perhaps it is inevitable that humble, mediocre natures, because they never run any risks and never aim at the heights, should remain to a large extent safe from error, while in great natures their very greatness spells danger.

Thus the perfect orator departs hyperbolically from the norms of decorum or verisimilitude only to be all the more effective. The following year, Ogier will write the preface to Schélandre's tragicomedy *Tyr et Sidon*, attacking the partisans of theatrical rules and regulations, defending a mix of comic and tragic scenes and rejecting 'récits' or narrative in favour of the portrayal of successive events on stage, events which Hardy will condemn as 'extravagances fabuleuses'.¹⁷

As Sophie Hache points out, Goulu takes up Ogier's debt to Longinus: 'D'une part il signale qu'il [Goulu] connaît le traité *Du Sublime* qu'il cite à l'occasion, et d'autre part cette conception du ravissement trahit effectivement l'influence du rhéteur grec' (p. 33). But no critic to my knowledge quotes the sections where Goulu translates Longinus, nor gives a sense of how closely he engaged with the treatise. Even Fumaroli, in the section on Goulu in *L'Age d'éloquence*, makes only a fleeting, footnoted reference to 'le Ps. Longin, que Goulu cite souvent' (p. 549).¹⁸ In fact, these quotations comprise very lengthy and direct translations of Longinus at several different points in Goulu's text. Pre-dating all other known vernacular translations, this is a significant early engagement with *On the Sublime*, and needs to be recognised as such.¹⁹

Born in 1576, Jean Goulu was the eldest son of Nicholas Goulu, professor of Greek at the College Royal in Paris. His mother, a Greek and Latin scholar in her own right, was the daughter of Jean Dorat, who had held the same royal chair. Goulu is known for his translations of Pseudo-Dionysius (1608) and

¹⁶ Ogier, *Apologie*, p. 81. See Hache, as in n. 13, pp. 33-34 for an excellent summary of Ogier's paradoxical engagement with Longinus. The apologist does not deny the hyperbolic excesses of Balzac's prose, but justifies them firstly with reference to the amplifications and so on required for the sublime style in the traditional tripartite division of styles, and secondly with reference to the ravishing discourse referred to by Longinus. This is fully contradictory, because the amplified, Ciceronian 'sublime style' is the one subverted by Longinus in his redefinitions of sublimity. This ambiguity is never resolved in Ogier.

¹⁷ Jean de Schélandre, *Tyr et Sidon: Tragédie divisée en deux journées*, Paris: R. Estienne, 1628. This is a reworking of Schélandre's tragedy of 1608. Alexandre Hardy, 'Au lecteur', *Le théâtre*, vol. V, 1628, pp. 6-10, reproduced in Giovanni Dotoli, *Temps de Préfaces. Le débat théâtral en France de Hardy à la querelle du 'Cid'*, Paris, 1996, pp. 177-8 (p. 178).

¹⁸ As in n. 6.

¹⁹ For a wider consideration of Longinus in early modern France, see Emma Gilby, *Sublime Worlds: Early Modern French Literature*, London, 2006.

Epictetus (1609), and for his *Vita* of François de Sales (1624).²⁰ Mathilde Bombart, cutting across literary and religious history, has shown the extent to which Goulu takes an interest in the materiality of his texts: 'privilèges', statements of royal approval, dedications to the members of the royal family and so on.²¹ As she suggests, Goulu is clearly trying to gain a worldly readership for himself, both for the purposes of pedagogy and for those of religious polemic. Setting 'lettres contre lettres', he sets himself against worldly authors even as he borrows their practices.²² Though published anonymously, it was easy to decipher the 'Phyllarque' of the *Lettres de Phyllarque à Ariste*, for the 'prince des feuilles' sends us directly to the Feuillants.

To this reading of Goulu's self-conscious manipulation of modes of production, we can add a study of his knowing engagement with the rhetoric of praise and blame, as this shades easily into satirical imitation. Having produced his laudatory *Vita* of François de Sales, Goulu finds himself well placed to target Balzac's own epideictic.²³ Goulu makes particular and repeated reference to the inappropriateness of Balzac's hyperbolic praise of others. The fictional addressee of Goulu's *Lettres*, 'Ariste', is a 'gentil-homme de la court' (vol. 1, p. 3) who resists the popularity of Balzac, coded here as the self-centred 'Narcisse', and turns to Phyllarque, 'un des premiers hommes de ce temps' (vol. 1, p. 4), for an expert opinion. Against Balzac's hyperbolic demonstrative, Goulu's Phyllarque predictably characterises his own writing as admirably straightforward:

Je quitte donc très-volontiers à Demonsthène, à Cicéron, à Narcisse et à tout autre la gloire de l'éloquence et la reputation de bien dire [...] je ne parle point d'autre langage que celui que j'ay entendu de ma mere, ou que j'ay appris dans la conversation des honnestes gens. (vol. 2, pp. 4-5)

Yoking vividness to a simplicity of line, and no doubt nodding at Balzac's time spent in the Low Countries, Phyllarque suggests that his speedy sketches of 'Narcisse' are more vivid than the polished inertia of Flemish still-lives: 'Tu les dois prendre [ces lettres] comme des desseins de Michel Ange, qui n'estans que croquez encore passent et excellent tous les adoucissements et les finissemens des tableaux & des peintures des Flamans' (vol. 1, pp. 9-10).²⁴ A careless artistic grace, such as that of Apelles as celebrated by Pliny and Quintilian, is turned here

²⁰ Given this background, it goes without saying that Goulu would have had access to Longinus in both Greek and Latin. The 1612 Petra edition was at the time of the quarrel circulating widely, recorded for example in the libraries of his friends Dupuy and De Thou.

²¹ 'Entre littérature et religion', as in n. 12.

²² See in particular Hélène Merlin-Kajman, 'Guez de Balzac, "Narcisse" epistolier: problèmes d'analyse', *Les Lettres ou la règle du je*, Anne Chamayou ed., Artois, 1999, pp. 27-40, 28.

²³ For E. Stopp, as in n. 8, 229, Goulu's *Vita* both presents us with a fine example of epideictic and 'reflects consciously and explicitly on the style suited to the kind of book he is writing'.

²⁴ On the simplicity of line or *disegno* associated with Michaelangelo and Vasari's opposition of *disegno* and *colore*, see in particular R. Williams, *Art, Theory, and Culture in Sixteenth Century Italy: From Techne to Metatechne*, Cambridge, 1997; C.C. Bambach, *Drawing and Painting in the Italian Renaissance Workshop: Theory and Practice, 1300-1600*, Cambridge, 1999; D. Rosand, *Drawing Acts: Studies in Graphic Expression and Representation*, Cambridge, 2001.

(as throughout the rhetorical tradition) into a literary topos, and applied self-servingly to Phyllarque himself.²⁵

In a magnificent series of extended parodies, Goulu takes the contemporary view that Balzac's letters are powerful and presses that notion into satirical service. He thus employs the *amplificatio* that is part of what he decries about Balzac's prose. Ministers use Balzac's letters for their sermons; lawyers cite them at the bar (preferring them to 'des Coustumes de France, & des Ordonnances des Rois' [vol. 1, p. 22]); and the services of doctors are rendered obsolete as 'les malades se guerissent à la veuë de ses Lettres' (vol. 1, pp 20-21). If all the books in France were to catch fire, Balzac's letters would be the sole survivors, conveyed from memory by *les honetes gens* just as the law of Moses was dictated by Ezra (vol. 1, p. 23). Heaping sarcastic praise upon Balzac, Goulu self-reflexively invites us to think about where to draw the line between epideictic and satire. He provides us with a perfect illustration of what he sees as the 'inepte et sottie maniere que tient Narcisse à louer les personnes illustres' (vol. 1, p. 57). In the end, the great men whom Balzac praises ought to pay him to keep quiet, so improbable are his descriptions of their greatness. Quoting Balzac's first letter to the Duc d'Epéron ('Quand je considere les actions de vostre vie, qui sont telles, que nous avons de la peine à les croire apres les avoir veuës, & en tel nombre, qu'il semble aux estrangers que vous viviez des le commencement de nostre Monarchie'), Goulu asks the crucial question: 'Considère bien, si veritablement il le louë, ou si en effet il ne se moque point de lui' (vol. 1, p. 60).²⁶

But how does Longinus come into this? The key to his exemplarity for Goulu is that *On the Sublime* itself aims to demonstrate the nature of sublimity by example, praising or dispraising the authors he cites. Fundamentally, Longinus aims at teaching us how to produce the same effects that we are affected by when we read sublime authors or listen to sublime speech. In this, he tries to differentiate himself from other Greek rhetors. Caecilius of Calaece, for example, 'endeavoured by a thousand instances to demonstrate the nature of the sublime' (1.1), but stopped short of covering those key points that would permit us as readers to 'reach the goal ourselves', or 'make it ours'. Unlike Cæcilus, Longinus will 'demonstrate' the sublime by bringing it before our eyes in numerous excerpts. Longinus gives many examples of texts that have affected him powerfully, sublimely, in the interests of asking what it is about them that makes them act on him thus. But he is also vastly preoccupied with the kinds of fault that cause the sublime to fail (and in this, the comedy of the text is underrated).

Goulu's first lengthy citation of Longinus comes in letter 17, entitled 'Sottes comparaisons & ineptes applications qui se trouvent dans les lettres de Narcisse' (vol. 1, p. 230). Goulu makes extensive use of *On the Sublime* 3 and 4, in which Longinus devotes much time to the faults which prevent authors attaining *hypsos*. Bombast or tumidity is one such fault. Another is puerility: 'the exact opposite of grandeur', 'an idea born in the classroom, whose overelaboration ends in failure' (3.4). Closely allied to this is 'a third kind of fault peculiar to

²⁵ Pliny the Elder, *Historia Naturalis*, xxxv, 36, 79; Quintilian, *Institutio Oratoria*, xii, 10.6.

²⁶ See *Les Premières Lettres de Guez de Balzac*, as in n. 5, p. 8.

emotional passages, what Theodorus used to call the pseudo-bacchanalian': this is 'emotion misplaced and pointless where none is needed, or unrestrained where restraint is required' (3.5). While the author is in private ecstasy, 'the audience', states Longinus with expressive brevity, 'is not' (3.5). And a further analogue of puerility is the 'frigidity' of Timaeus, whose 'insatiable passion for starting strange conceits often lands him in the most puerile effects':

In his eulogy of Alexander the Great he speaks of 'one who subdued the whole of Asia in fewer years than Isocrates took to write his Panegyric urging war on Persia'. Surely this is an odd comparison of the Macedonian to the sophist, for it is obvious, friend Timaeus, that on this showing Isocrates was a far better man than the Spartans, since they spent thirty years in subduing Messene, while he composed his Panegyric in no more than ten! (4.2-3)

Sublimity, states Longinus, cannot survive indifference catalysed by this kind of cloudy analogy, which takes the process of writing a panegyric and compares it confusedly with waging war. Timaeus cannot use the Isocrates example to praise Alexander for his speed without simultaneously condemning the Spartans for their tardiness.

For Goulu, in analysing Timaeus' disorder, Longinus has provided us with an admirably vivid example of *vituperatio*, painting a portrait that can stand equally well as the image of Balzac. It is worth quoting the passage in full, to give an idea of the extent of his translation:

Je veus ici te rapporter un passage du Rheteur Longinus, qui nous dépeint naïvement les qualitez de Narcisse, sous la personne de Timee l'Orateur, dont il parle de la sorte. 'Timée, dit-il, est plein de ce qui s'appelle froid en matiere de discours, homme à la verité qui avoit quelque suffisance, & dont les discours ont parfois je ne sçai quoi de relevé: au reste assés ingenieus & inventif; mais il avoit ce mal que d'estre un grand & ordinaire censeur des fautes d'autrui; au contraire entierement stupide, & du tout insensible aus siénes. La demangeaison qui le tenoit de produire toujours des pensés qui fussent étranges & nouvelles, estoit cause qu'il tomboit ordinairement en des puerilités tres-grandes, dont je rapporterai un ou deus exemples. Voulant louer le grand Alexandre, il dit, qu'il se rendit Seigneur de toute l'Asie, en moins d'années qu'Isocrate n'avoit composé son Panegyrique. Voila certes, dit-il, une admirable comparaison du Roi de Macedone avec un Sophiste, & de la conquete de l'Asie avec un' oraison panegyrique. (vol. 1, pp. 233-4)

As we see here, Timaeus is incapable of the self-reflection that great writing demands: 'un grand & ordinaire censeur des fautes d'autrui', he is none the less 'insensible aus siénes'. Since his faults are eminently applicable to 'Narcisse', the portrait stands for the latter too. Once again associating believability with the simple properties of line, Goulu states that Longinus 'l'a craionné avec sa plume':

Si Narcisse avoit donné de l'argent au sieur du Moustier pour tirer son portrait, ce Peintre pour excellent qu'il soit, ne l'auroit pas si bien représenté avec son craion, que le Rheteur Longinus l'a craionné avec sa plume.²⁷ (vol. 1, pp. 234-5)

Timaeus' (Balzac's) mistake is to aim ambitiously at the unfamiliar, at 'des pensées qui fussent étranges et nouvelles', rather than remaining within the smooth channels of accepted imitative practice.

The same section of *On the Sublime* is covered in Goulu's second volume, published in 1628, in the letter entitled 'Des mauvais styles & qui ont esté blasmés par les anciens maitres de la Retorique'. Goulu refers to Longinus in the context of his childhood reading, thirty years earlier, of 'les anciens maitres de la Retorique' (vol. 2, p. 195).²⁸ The chief lesson to be taken away from Longinus is how to avoid the bombastic style characteristic of those who wish to attain grandeur:

Je ferai neantmoins pour te complaire ce que le temps & ma memoire me pourront permettre, en effleurant seulement ce que je me souviendrai avoir observé de cette matiere dans les livres des meilleurs maistres de l'eloquence. Le premier qui s'offre à mon esprit est le Rheteur Longinus, de qui tu apprendras à eviter le style enflé & ampoullé, auquel, dit-il, naturellement sont portez ceus qui sont desirous de la grandeur & de la majesté du langage. La crainte qu'ils ont d'estre condamnés de foiblesse & de secheresse, pousse leurs esprits à cette enfleure vicieuse, qui les fait tomber dans cela mesme qu'ils tâchent d'eviter. (vol. 2, pp. 195-6)

This is not how to attain the sublime, but how to avoid the ridiculous. As Longinus had put it:

Tumours are bad things whether in books or bodies, those empty inflations, void of sincerity, as likely as not producing the opposite to the effect intended. For, as they say, "there's nought so dry as dropsy." But, while tumidity seeks to outdo the sublime, puerility is the exact opposite of grandeur; utterly abject, mean spirited, and in fact the most ignoble of faults. What then is puerility? Is it not obviously an idea born in the classroom, whose overelaboration ends in frigid failure? (3.3-4)

Goulu's version of this runs as follows:

Les tumeurs au corps, & les enfleures au langage sont également dangereuses; celles là font perdre l'embonpoint à ceus qui en sont malades; celles-ci ostent la creance au discours, qui ne peut estre enflé & veritable tout ensemble. Ces maladies nous reduisent à l'estat que

²⁷ See Tallemant, *Historiettes*, as in n. 10, vol. 2, pp. 659-662, on Du Moustier.

²⁸ Thirty years before the publication of the letters, Goulu was only three: the persona of Phyllarque is evidently more senior.

nous voulons éviter. Il n'y a rien, disent les medecins, plus sec que l'hydropique, l'enfleure du langage est une marque certaine de la secheresse du style. Celui qui enfle son discours en voulant passer la proportion des justes grandeurs, se jette dans le precipice de la bassesse du style puerile & d'écolier, qui est tout proche voisin du sublime et du magnifique; mais qui est bas tout à fait & propre d'un esprit etroit & petit, où il n'y a point de generosité. Qu'est ce que ce style puerile? Ce n'est autre chose qu'une pensée d'écolier, qui par un vain amusement aboutit dans la froideur. (vol. 2, p. 196-7)

Some of Goulu's adjustments are striking here. The translation is free, particularly towards the end of the passage cited, but not free enough to be from memory. The image of the writer casting themselves from a precipice is an adaptation of a maxim cited by Longinus at 3.3: 'All who aim at grandeur, in trying to avoid the charge of being feeble and arid, fall somehow into this fault [tumidity], pinning their faith to the maxim that "To miss a high aim is to fall without shame".' The shame, suggests Longinus, is fully present, or ought to be: to aim high at grandeur is to misunderstand what sublime grandeur is, and to underestimate the need for vivid communication. But we see that the emphasis on 'la proportion des justes grandeurs' is a moralising interpolation by Goulu: Balzac has lost all sense of proportion. His writing is unbelievable, improbable, non-verisimilar: he '[oste] la creance au discours, qui ne peut estre enflé & veritable tout ensemble'.

Goulu's demonstrative, his dispraise of Balzac, here centres on the matter of *demonstratio*: Balzac's inability (as opposed to Goulu's ability) to depict a subject vividly and believably. The most successful writers will bring things before our very eyes, and the act of praising them will bring their descriptive talents to the surface once again. The link between *demonstratio* and demonstrative discourse is often made in the very well-established body of classical critical literature on the community between the literary and the visual arts. When Plutarch praises this historian Thucydides in his essay *On the Glory of Athens* (famously the source of the phrase 'painting is mute poetry, poetry a speaking picture', attributed to Simonides of Athens), he says that Thucydides is just as skilled at the vivid representation of emotions and characters as the artist Euphranor.²⁹ Both Thucydides' *demonstratio* and Plutarch's own demonstrative rhetoric engage with tropes of verisimilitude: 'this seems so real that...'. But it is crucial to this tradition that verisimilitude can, on occasion, encompass exaggeration or hyperbole. One thinks here of Quintilian's praise of Myron, the Athenian sculptor of the mid-5th century BC, and his discus thrower:

Where can we find a more violent or elaborate attitude than that of the Discobolus of Myron? Yet the critic who disapproved of the figure because it was not upright, would merely show his utter failure to understand the sculptor's art, in which the very novelty and difficulty of execution is what most deserves our praise. A similar impression of

²⁹ Plutarch, *Moralia*, 18a. On this, see in particular van Eck, as in n. 4, pp. 142-3, and Leonard Barkan, *Mute Poetry, Speaking Pictures*, Princeton, 2013, p. 28, pp. 139-40.

grace and charm is produced by rhetorical figures, whether they be figures of thought or figures of speech. For they involve a certain departure from the straight line and have the merit of variation from the ordinary usage.³⁰

So there is an exaggerated arc here, an excess; but this exaggeration itself produces a vividly realistic grace and charm.³¹ The skill with which Myron manipulates this exaggerated, extraordinary, improbable parabola justifies Quintilian's hyperbolic praise. This is not just to pun on parabola and hyperbole. This passage literalises the question of where we draw the line: where a sculptor, or by extension, a writer, might draw a line in placing their subject, and where we draw the line in praising them for their distinction. This involves, for Quintilian here, a 'certain departure from the straight line'. As we saw Ogier put it in his *Apologie*: 'il faut qu'il [le parfait Orateur] sorte quelque fois des chemins' (p. 81). And as Longinus puts it in Ogier's source text: 'One must know, then, where to draw the line in each case. The hyperbole is sometimes ruined by overshooting the mark. Overdo the strain and the thing sags. (38.1)'

Longinus' 'drawing of the line' is not, and can never be, an attempt at regulation, because his prescription defers to the infinite variability of 'in each case', creates a phenomenology which fuses a text and a reader's sublime reaction to it. It is crucial to note that the hyperbole 'sometimes' fails; but not always. Longinus had started his text by distancing himself from the rules and regulations of persuasive rhetoric with its *inventio* and *dispositio*: 'Experience in invention and the due disposal and marshalling of facts do not show themselves in one or two touches but emerge gradually from the whole tissue of the composition, while, on the other hand, a well-timed flash of sublimity shatters everything like a bolt of lightning and reveals the full power of the speaker at a single stroke' (1.4). This is (perhaps deliberately) missed by Goulu, who is using Longinus to make points about a normative imitation at which Balzac, in his view, fails.

This comes across again in another passage of translation, where Goulu takes up the following passage of *On the Sublime*, 13, in which Longinus tackles the question of imitation. His comparison for the sublime is the Pythian priestess, delivering her oracles as if impregnated by the vapors of Apollo's sacred cave:

Here is an author who shows us, if we will condescend to see, that there is another road, besides those we have mentioned, which leads to sublimity. What and what manner of road is this? Zealous imitation of the great prose writers and poets of the past. That is the aim, dear friend; let us hold to it with all our might. For many are carried away by the inspiration of another, just as the story runs that the Pythian priestess on approaching the tripod where there is, they say, a rift in the earth,

³⁰ Quintilian, *Institutio Oratoria*, Harold Edgeworth Butler tr., Cambridge MA, 1920, 2.13.8-10.

³¹ Note this effect upon Kenneth Clark: 'He has taken a moment of action so transitory that students of athletics still debate if it is feasible, and he has given it the completeness of a cameo.' *The Nude: A Study in Ideal Form*, Princeton, 1984 [1956], p. 178.

exhaling divine vapour, thereby becomes impregnated with the divine power and is at once inspired to utter oracles; so, too, from the natural genius of those old writers there flows into the hearts of their admirers as it were an emanation from those holy mouths. (13)

Writing, in this passage, is born of reading and listening. Just as Longinus confuses any hierarchical relation between himself and his readers or listeners, hoping that they will become sublime authors in their turn, so he merges his own positions as writer and reader/listener. His own writing requires a prior exposure to great models. *On the Sublime* is clear both on the 'zealous' mental effort required generally in reading and writing, and on the fact that the sublime writing that may or may not result finds its completion only in response. Goulu takes this up extensively in letter 16 of his second volume, headed 'De l'imitation, et qu'elle est necessaire à ceux qui veulent parvenir à la perfection de l'Eloquence':

Longinus qui fut en son temps un excellent maitre de cette science, en son traité du genre sublime de l'Eloquence en parle de la sorte. 'Il y a, dit-il, un autre chemin pour aller & parvenir à cette hauteur & sublimité dont nous traitons. Et quel est ce chemin pensez-vous que nous voulons dire? c'est celui de l'imitation des excellens auteurs, tant des orateurs que des poëtes, qui nous portent à faire comme eus, avec ardeur et jalousie. Car c'est la verité qu'il y en a beaucoup qui puisent l'esprit de ces grans hommes à force de lire & de considerer leurs ouvrages. Et de là comme par un divin enthousiasme sont emportez & ravis à parler plus hautement, & plus sublimement que la condition des hommes ne porte. Comme on raconte de la Sibylle lors qu'elle s'approche du treprie: sous lequel on dit qu'il y a une ouverture dans la terre dont s'exhale une vapeur divine, de laquelle cette femme comme engrossée & remplie de cet esprit, va puis apres rendant les oracles par inspiration. De mesme en est-il de ceus qui s'approchent de ces grans personnages du temps passé, & qui se rendent familiers avecques eus par la lecture ordinaire de leurs ouvrages: car de là, comme de certains sacrez soupirans il sort des exhalaisons toutes divines, qui se jettent dans les ames de ceus qui les imitent, dont par apres elles conçoivent les hautes & les sublimes pensées, que d'elles-mesmes elles ne pourroient enfanter. (vol. 2, pp. 244-6)

But where, for Longinus, imitation and emulation are means by which the soul may shape itself imaginatively from the models of great writers in order potentially to produce a sublime effect for an audience, Goulu always aims at a stricter regulation. In a lengthy series of analogies associating inspiration, impregnation, beauty and harmony, he takes us through the opening chapters of the second book of Dionysius of Halicarnassus' *On Imitation* – the ugly man who shows his pregnant wife pictures of beautiful images in order to have attractive children, Zeuxis painting Helen as an amalgamation of beautiful young girls³² - as

³² On the ubiquity of the Zeuxis myth in the Renaissance, see in particular Elizabeth Mansfield, *Too Beautiful to Picture: Zeuxis, Myth and Mimesis*, Minneapolis, 2007.

well as aspiring painters who emulate Michelangelo or Leonardo da Vinci or Titian. He finally concludes with the need for 'règles d'analytique':

Nostre imitation alors est parfaite & accomplie, quand par les regles de l'analytique nous developpons & decousons la besogne d'un auteur, & que nous considerons & voyons à l'oeil, quel artifice, quel moyen, & quelles regles il a suivi pour faire un tel ouvrage [...]. (vol. 2, p. 253)

We note the insistence here on the breaking down, the unstitching, of analytic practice (from *analein*: to loosen); the rules within rules.

Goulu's letter on imitation culminates in a passage from *On the Sublime* 4 in which Xenophon and, in turn, Timaeus are criticised for the inappropriateness of their use of metaphor. They trade on the similarity of the Greek for 'maiden' and the 'pupil' of the eye:

A ce propos le Reteur Longinus raconte une histoire que je te rapporterai. 'Par fois, dit-il, comme il est arrivé à ces grans heros du temps passé de s'oublier et de s'endormir, il y en a eu d'autres qui ont pensé devoir être pris pour des Platons & des Xenophons, en imitant seulement leurs fautes. Xenophon au traité qu'il a fait de la forme du gouvernement des Lacedemoniens, parle de la sorte de la modestie des jeunes hommes de Lacedemone. Vous ne les eussiez entendu proferer une seule parole, non plus que s'ils eussent esté de pierre; vous ne les eussiez pas veu tourner les yeus, non plus que s'ils eussent esté de bronze; vous les eussiez jugez plus modestes que les vierges mesmes des yeus."³³ Tu dois noter, Ariste, que les Grecs appellent 'choras' pucelles, ce que nous appellons les prunelles des yeus. Xenophon par une froide allusion, au lieu d'user du mot de 'choron' pucelles, avoit mieus aimé se servir en cet endroit du mot de 'parthenon' vierges, pour exprimer avec plus de force & de gentillesse, ce lui sembloit, la modestie de ces jeunes hommes. Surquoi, dit Longinus, l'orateur Timée, qui estoit l'un de ces mauvais imitateurs, a mis la main là dessus, & n'a pas voulu laisser à Xenophon cette allusion pour froide qu'elle soit, de façon qu'invectivant contre Agathocles, & qui auroit, dit-il, entrepris, comme il a fait, de ravir sa propre cousine qui estoit promise en mariage à un autre, qui n'auroit eu aus yeus des putains plustost que des pucelles? Il a pensé qu'il avoit autant de droit d'appeller putains les prunelles des yeux d'un homme effronté, que Xenophon de les nommer vierges dans les yeux d'une personne modeste.' (vol. 2, pp. 267-70)³⁴

³³ 'But why speak of Timæus when those very demi-gods, Xenophon and Plato, for all their training in the school of Socrates, yet sometimes forgot themselves in their fondness for such cheap effects? In his *Constitution of Sparta* Xenophon says, "Certainly you would hear as little speech from these Spartans as from marble statues, and could as easily catch the eye of a bronze figure; indeed you might well think them as modest as the maidens in their eyes".' (4.4)

³⁴ "Timaeus, laying hands as it were on stolen goods, could not leave even this frigid conceit to Xenophon. For example, speaking of Agathocles when he carried off his cousin from the unveiling ceremony although she had been given in marriage to another, he says, "Who could have done such a thing, had he not harlots instead of maidens in his eyes?" (4.5)

The example is transposed rather literally from Longinus to Goulu. But the conclusion is entirely reworked. Longinus uses the example to say that our virtues and vices spring from much the same sources. While beauty of style, sublimity, and charm all contribute to 'successful composition', these same attributes are conducive of failure just as often as they succeed (5). And Longinus notes that 'we must say the same, I suppose, about variety of construction, hyperbole, and the use of plurals for singulars' (5). Again, the sublime resists any efforts to define it because it finds completion only in the unpredictable course of communication and reception. Goulu's conclusion, however, entirely suppresses this emphasis on the confounding force of sublimity:

La mauvaise imitation rend aussi ridicules ceus qui ne sçavent pas faire choix de ce qui est vice ou vertu dans les livres, qu'il faut lire & imiter avec beaucoup de jugement. Mais c'est se monstrier tout à fait ignoramment presomptueux en quelque art & science que ce soit, & sur tout en la faculté de bien dire, de ne vouloir pas suivre le chemin qu'ont tenu les grans Maitres qui l'ont cultivée & exercée [...]. (pp. 270-1)

Here too, poetic description and artistic prescription blur across the disciplines. In each case, Longinus' conclusions are more subtle than comes across in Goulu's rendering. His *hypsos* is not a movement upwards or an improvement in any straightforwardly linear or moral sense, but is a vivid engagement with the authors and speakers he cites. Goulu, making Longinus' lessons available by proxy, turns this desire for flexible reception into a fear of the new. The lexis of transmission becomes tainted by fears of contagion. We need to seek to emulate the *proper* models: to 'suivre le chemin qu'ont tenu les grans Maitres', or follow a pre-determined path. Goulu's praise of Longinus, his dispraise of Balzac, is indistinguishable from its censorious essence, but also compellingly self-reflexive. It opens out onto the uncertain mechanisms of the process of passing judgement. Goulu's rhetoric is interesting not because of the judgements it makes – not just because Balzac is blameworthy – but because of its attempts to outline the vividness and verisimilitude required for successful demonstrative.

In sum, Goulu uses Longinus to silence Balzac on account of the liberties Balzac takes, not least with rhetorical convention. But the *Lettres de Phyllarque à Ariste* do more than this, too. How do we identify the proper models? By what token is excellence to be known? Goulu moves constantly, despite himself, between correction and interrogation. He cannot appropriate Longinus' diverse and sometimes contradictory examples without conjuring the hermeneutic complexity involved in reading him. He takes from his reading of the classics the need for epideictic to maintain a clear distinction between virtue and vice. He assumes shared values and works on that basis, co-opting Longinus in the process. But in so doing he undermines the boundaries he is attempting to set up, because *On the Sublime* appeals to the context-dependency of reaction. The *Lettres de Phyllarque à Ariste* demonstrate very clearly that Longinus has a crucial role to play in these broad early seventeenth-century debates about where to draw the line between forceful novelty and foolish excess.

ABSTRACT

This article looks at the place of Longinus in Goulu's *Lettres de Phyllarque à Ariste* (1627-8), written in response to the publication of Guez de Balzac's collected volumes of letters. It pays close attention to Goulu's translations of sections of *On the Sublime*, considering the ways in which Goulu's praise of Longinus connects with his dispraise of Balzac. Goulu tries (problematically) to use Longinus to show that Balzac exceeds the bounds of vivid, plausible and persuasive discourse.

KEYWORDS

Longinus, Goulu, Balzac, sublime, ekphrasis